



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription, \$5.00 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office on STREET & SMITH 250 William St., N. Y.

No. 63.

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962 WEST ADAMS ST. NEAR MORGAN

CHICAGO ILL.

BUFFALO BILL AND THE RED RIDERS

OR
THE MAD DRIVER OF THE OVERLAND



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
'BUFFALO BILL'

THERE, UNKEMPT AND DISHEVELED, STOOD SILK-RIBBON SAM, A GLEAMING REVOLVER IN EACH HAND. "I HAVE COME TO KILL!" HE CRIED, FACING BUFFALO BILL AND HIS COMPANIONS.



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No. 63.

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BUFFALO BILL AND THE RED RIDERS;

OR,

The Mad Driver of the Overlands.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE REDMEN.

Winding along an overland trail, a stagecoach drawn by six horses was climbing slowly a mountain, the scenery on all sides growing grander as the top of the ridge was neared.

At last the summit was reached, and the driver drew rein to rest his horses, at the same time gazing with admiration upon the superb view that met his vision; an admiration not diminished by the fact that he had seen that same broad expanse many and many a time before.

The face of this driver was a manly one, a beard of dark brown concealing the lower portion, and his hair hung in curling masses upon his broad shoulders.

He was dressed in black pants, top-boots, a fancy silk shirt, with black scarf under the broad collar,

knotted in sailor fashion, and wore upon his head a silver-embroidered Mexican sombrero.

A red silk sash was about his waist, half-concealing his belt of arms.

His eyes were large, tender in expression in repose, but could light up with a dangerous fire in excitement or danger.

Such was Silk-Ribbon Sam, a man known far and wide as the most reckless yet skillful driver of the Rocky Mountain overland trails.

Within the coach were several passengers, their faces at the windows, as they gazed out upon the grand panorama.

"Come, ponies, we must move on," said Silk-Ribbon Sam, after a couple of minutes' rest; but hardly had the stage moved its length, when from behind boulders upon either side, and thickets ahead and in

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rear, a withering fire was poured from the ambush.

Down dropped the six horses in their tracks; Silk-Ribbon Sam fell backward on the top of the stage and lay motionless, the blood streaming from a wound on his head, while from within the coach came wildest cries.

But still from the ambush rattled the death-shots, though no resistance was made.

There had come no stern command, so well known upon the border, of "Hands up!" but, without it, the shots from ambush had leveled the horses, the driver, and were tearing into the stagecoach among the passengers.

Gradually the shrieks within the coach died away, as the fire from the ambush kept up a constant rattle, and then all was still as death, for death was present there on the hill top.

Then over the top of a bowlder peer a bunch of gay feathers, followed by the face of a white man, disguised after the Indian fashion, in full warpaint.

Satisfied with the silence, that rested upon the scene, he stepped out in full view.

Another followed, then another and another, until thirteen painted forms stood in line!

Not one spoke, not a gesture was made; but they moved toward the stagecoach.

The doors were opened and the dead drawn out upon the ground.

There was a woman among those dead, and children, too!

No word was spoken, while one of the red fiends climbed up and glanced at the driver.

He seemed to be satisfied, for, after robbing him, he sprung down to join his comrades, who were rifling the bodies and the coach of booty.

There was something appalling in this silent robbery of the dead. Not a word was spoken, not a gesture was made, but the red band seemed to act as though each man was moved by the same thought and will.

From within the coach one took a small buckskin bag and silently passed it to a companion.

Another bag was taken out, and so on it went until twelve had been found, all the same size, and apparently possessing considerable weight.

Then the one who had no treasure-bag to carry walked away in the gathering gloom, and behind him came in single file his comrades, each bearing on his shoulder the booty, and over the ridge the silent Red-men, the Mysterious Thirteen, passed out of sight, leaving the stage, with its slain horses and passengers, a ghastly spectacle for the rising moon to look upon.

Hardly had the last one of the Mysterious Red-men, as these outlaws were called, disappeared, when the form of the driver, lying back on the top of the stage, as he had fallen, rose to a sitting posture.

He stretched forth his hands as though to grasp the empty air, then pressed them hard upon his head—as if to collect his scattered senses.

Then he rose to a standing position, gazed about him with a vacant stare, which suddenly changed into a look of horror.

With a spring he was upon the ground, and stared upon the dead bodies of the slain like a man gone mad.

He rushed to the stage, sprung upon the step and leaned within for a short moment, and then, springing again to the ground, dropping upon his knees among the dead, crawled from body to body, gazing upon each intently—an old man, an elderly woman, a young girl, a boy and a rough-faced borderman, and from his lips broke a cry such as only human lips can utter when reason flies, and, leaping to his feet, he dashed down the mountainside like a madman.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCOUT'S PLEDGE.

On the far frontier, not very many miles from where the stagecoach of Silk-Ribbon Sam was attacked by the Mysterious Redmen, a coach rolled up to a station on the overland, and from it sprung three men, all thoroughly armed. They were met by the

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station agent with the air of one who addressed his superiors.

Seats were given them under the shed piazza; a tin basin, soap, fresh water and a towel were provided, and the agent said, with a bow:

"Supper will be ready in half an hour, gentlemen, and I have a flask of prime juice ter coax up a appetite with."

"No soldiers have arrived yet, Ben?" asked one of the trio.

"No, sir, not yet; but I guesses they'll come in afore long."

As he spoke, several horsemen appeared in sight, coming up the hill toward the station.

In the lead was an officer in uniform, and by his side rode a man clad in buckskin.

Behind these two came a sergeant, with a dozen cavalymen following him by twos.

"There comes Captain Carrol now, and what a splendid-looking fellow that is riding by his side!" said one of the trio on the piazza.

"Yer has a eye fer beauty, superintendent, for that feller are ther purtiest specimen o' man-critters in these parts, and he hev lately come hereabout as a scout, and they calls him Buff'ler Bill," explained the station agent, Ben Long.

"Buffalo Bill! the famous scout?" cried Colonel Cassiday, the Overland superintendent, for it was he and his two associates who had dismounted from the coach.

He and his two comrades fastened their eyes upon the man in buckskin, who rode by the side of the army officer.

Tall, broad-shouldered, straight as a soldier on duty, athletic and quick in his movements, he looked just what he was—a man of giant strength and Indian activity.

His face was a study for an artist, for the features were perfect, and upon each and every one was the stamp of manhood, a look of indomitable nerve, and with a spirit to do and dare shining from the dark, piercing eyes.

His fine, silken hair fell upon his shoulders, his

broad-brimmed sombrero of grayish hue shaded his face, and his form was clad in buckskin, excepting that he wore cavalry boots coming above his knees.

Such was Buffalo Bill when he rode up to the Overland station by the side of Captain Louis Carrol, of the United States Army.

Colonel Cassiday—colonel by courtesy along the line—stepped forward and greeted the newcomers with the remark:

"Glad to see you, Captain Carrol, and but half an hour behind us; but, let me introduce my friends."

His two companions were introduced, and then Captain Carrol said:

"Colonel Cassiday, let me present to you William Cody, chief of scouts at the fort, and better known as Buffalo Bill."

"I know you well by name, sir, and am happy to meet you, while I am glad that Captain Carrol has brought you with him, as your advice will be most valuable."

"Yes, Colonel Cassiday, when I received your letter by the Pony Rider, asking me to meet you here and telling of the fearful massacre in the mountains, I talked it over with Colonel Miles, and we decided that Buffalo Bill must come with me, as he is a power in border affairs."

"I wrote you, sir, as soon as I heard of this terrible affair of poor Silk-Ribbon Sam's coach, for I deemed it best to consult with you at once, and we are prepared to do all in our power to aid you in ferreting out these assassins."

"And the driver, whom you call Silk-Ribbon Sam?" quietly asked Buffalo Bill.

"Is the best man we have on the Overland; he can drive as no other man can that I ever saw; he is not afraid of anything, and I am only surprised that he was so completely taken at a disadvantage."

"Where is he?" asked Cody, having, by general consent, to take the initiative in the questioning.

"Lying at the point of death from brain fever, caused by his wound."

"He was wounded, then?"

"Yes, by a bullet that must have been fired from

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the ground, for it struck his forehead, glanced upward under the scalp and cut out at the top of the head.

"The bone is not fractured, but the shock was severe and the fiends must have believed him dead, or they would have killed him as they did the others."

"How many in all?"

"Four—an old man, elderly lady, girl and boy."

"All were killed?"

"All, and robbed, while, in his delirium, Silk-Ribbon Sam says that the coach was robbed of thirteen boxes of gold as well."

"This is terrible," Cody remarked.

"Such is his story, and he repeated it over and over again last night when I sat up with him."

"Does he say nothing more?"

"Nothing! He came rushing on foot into the station, his face stained with blood, and he shouted:

"Dead! all dead! The gold all gone! Murder! Murder! We saw that he was in a high fever, sent for the surgeon, and put him to bed, while we sent a guard out over the line. The coach was found upon Big View Mountain, and the bodies of the passengers lying about, the wolves having already begun their work. The top of the stage was stained with blood, doubtless Silk-Ribbon Sam's.

"More could not be discovered. It was a clean sweep, but who by, Heaven only knows, and I hope, Captain Carrol, with your aid we can hunt these murderers off the face of the earth."

"All I can do, I will do, Colonel Cassiday; but, Cody, what do you think of it?" said Captain Carrol.

"I haven't thought yet, sir; but, who is this Silk-Ribbon Sam, Colonel Cassiday?"

"He is one of our best drivers. He came on the line two years ago, and asked for a position as driver. Our driver had been shot by Indians, and Sam brought the coach in over a bad road, and the passengers were loud in his praise, so I gave him the place and have never regretted it. I asked his name, and he said Sam, that was all. The drivers had a tournament soon after, and he entered for it and won the silk reins, and the boys, therefore, dubbed him

Silk-Ribbon Sam. He is a splendid-looking fellow, gentlemanly in his manners; but what do you say, Captain Carrol, is best to be done to find these murderers?"

And Colonel Cassiday again turned to Captain Carrol, who remarked:

"Put it in Cody's hands."

"Ah! but will you undertake the work, Mr. Cody?"

"I will ferret out the mystery, sir, and bring those devils to their just punishment," was the response of Buffalo Bill, uttered in a way that showed he meant to do just what he pledged himself to do.

Having pledged himself thus to the work, Buffalo Bill bade Captain Carrol and the soldiers good-by, when they retired that night, and set off with Colonel Cassiday and his escort of two men, at dawn the following morning, to go on the trail of the murderers.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAD DRIVER.

It had been the intention of Colonel Cassiday to ask the aid of the soldiers, and these with a party of his own men, and several of the Rocky Mountain Detective League, he hoped to run the outlaws to earth; but, after his talk with Captain Carrol and Cody, he had decided to leave it all in the hands of the famous scout.

The colonel had perfect confidence in Buffalo Bill, for he had long known him by reputation, though not personally acquainted with the man.

He had heard of him as a Pony Express rider, and his hair-breadth adventures, of his raids against road agents and horse raiders; and again, as a noted scout, guide and Indian fighter.

He knew how much he was dreaded by evil-doers, and he knew that no better man, in fact none so good as Buffalo Bill could have been selected for the work to be done.

When they arrived at the station where Silk-Ribbon Sam lay ill, they found the hundred people composing the settlement considerably excited over the affair.

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Another driver had been found to go through in the place of Silk-Ribbon Sam, but his coach had been attended by a guard of five men on horseback.

The station was more of a settlement than the other stage stops, for there were, as has been said, about a hundred dwellers there.

There was a repair shop for coaches, a harness store, grocery and a so-called tavern, with about a score of cabins.

To the tavern Sam had been taken and given the best room.

The landlord was a doctor, had practiced medicine in the East until he had fallen from grace from some cause which he kept to himself; then he had "skipped" West, mined for a while, and at length he began to practice as man and horse doctor, as well as a landlord.

He had skill in his profession, though, and had taken fine care of the sick and wounded driver.

"Dr. Dunn, this is the great scout, Buffalo Bill. He may stop a short time with you, and wants to help you take care of your patient, who, by the way, I hope is improving," said Colonel Cassiday when they stopped at the tavern.

"Scout Cody, I am proud to meet you. Come in, sir, and consider this your home for life.

"As to Silk-Ribbon, colonel, he is delirious yet, but he has less fever and his wound is doing well," announced the doctor, who was a pompous-looking little man whom the boys called "Pills," and also "Gamecock," either cognomen being appropriate.

"He has said nothing you can get a clew from, doctor?" the colonel asked.

"Not a word that I can understand. It's a bad case, Cody, for the poor fellow was wounded, just here on the head, the ball glancing upward and cutting out just here," and the doctor showed the places indicated.

"A pistol shot?"

"No; a rifle bullet made the wound."

"He was robbed?"

"Oh, yes, of a fine watch and chain, but of how much money I do not know.

"Oh, Lordy! Buffalo Bill, there he is now." The doctor sprang to his feet with a wild scream, for there, behind him, unkempt and disheveled, stood Sam, a gleaming revolver in each hand.

"I have come to kill!" he cried, in hoarse tones.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRAIL.

At the sudden appearance of Silk-Ribbon Sam, risen from his bed of fever and suffering, there was a hasty scattering.

Colonel Cassiday, Pills the landlord-doctor, and Tips a stable boy cared little to face a madman.

But Buffalo Bill did not flinch. On the contrary, he went straight toward the fever-crazed man and said, while he extended his hand:

"Why, Sam, how glad I am to see you! I am Buffalo Bill, you know."

This coolness and confidence saved the life of the scout, and of the others, for Sam hesitated as he glanced into Cody's face, as if trying to think sanely.

"Buffalo Bill! Yes, he's a great scout, and I want him to help me."

"I will help you, Sam, so let us have a talk."

The driver allowed himself to be led back to the bed, and Buffalo Bill quietly took the pistols from him and laid them on the table.

Then he said:

"Lie down, Sam, while we talk, and I will call the doctor to give us both a nice drink."

The doctor then re-entered, for he had been expectantly at hand.

His face wore an anxious look, but he fixed two drinks, and the one the patient drank was a cooling one with a sedative in it.

The scout rattled on pleasantly, talking of various matters until Sam, overcome by the medicine, dropped into a deep sleep.

Instantly Pills removed the revolvers and all else that could be used as a dangerous weapon by the invalid.

He had been taught a lesson he would not soon

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forget, the leaving his patient the means of doing harm.

"Well, Cody, what did you learn in your talk with him?" asked Colonel Cassiday, when they left the driver asleep.

"I learned but little, colonel, for he talked at random; but I will go up to Danger Station and look around, and begin work at once."

"Then I leave all in your hands, and if you need aid call on the men in the station nearest to you."

"This robbery and murder, I am sure, were planned beforehand, colonel."

The colonel soon after bade the station farewell, and returned to his own post, leaving Buffalo Bill master of his own movements.

Cody started for Danger Station, a point near the place where the coach had been held up.

The station boss, Nick Sawyer, greatly admired the well-known scout, so welcomed Buffalo Bill warmly.

Nick was an honest-faced fellow, who knew only his duty to his employers.

The scout showed his papers from Colonel Cassiday, giving him full freedom to do all he deemed best in his work of solving the mystery of the massacre, and the first request of Bill was to ask to see the cabin of Silk-Ribbon Sam; but Sawyer was unable to give him admission, as the driver had the key, and, of course, no one felt at liberty, while the owner still lived, of breaking the lock.

"Was Sam in the habit of taking daily hunts when he was off duty?"

"Yes; he was always off in the mountains, somewhere."

"Which way did he generally go?"

"Down the trail."

The next day Cody mounted horse and started "down the trail."

He carefully examined the left of the trail as he advanced, for he went on foot, his horse following.

Not once did he glance to the right side of the trail, for he would return on that side.

At length, some five miles from the station, he

came to a trail leading off from the Overland track.

It was just where the main trail crossed a small stream; but there was an evident trace of a track in the water up the stream.

He mounted his horse and followed, examining the banks carefully.

At length there came under his eye, several hundred yards from the crossing, a well-defined trail leading out of the stream.

A mile did the scout follow this trail, and at last came into a little cañon, through the center of which a small stream glided.

The entrance was not over fifty feet wide, and across it were stretched two ropes, as a barrier, and made fast to trees on either side.

Unfastening one of the ropes, the scout discovered that the cañon was used as a corral, or pasture for a horse, for it abounded in grass and water, and there was no chance for an animal to escape from it when the ropes were up.

From the character and number of the tracks it must have been used for a long time, but, being several acres in area, one horse could find pasture there for an unlimited time.

From this cañon ran several trails, showing that the horseman did not always go and come the same way.

One of these trails Cody followed back, and came out on the mountain by Danger Station.

The next day he again started out on the trail, and made a complete search of the cañon; but that the horseman had gone there other than to pasture his horse he could not discover.

On his return he took another of the trails and it brought him out in the valley opposite to the station.

The third day he rode one of Silk-Ribbon Sam's horses, and the animal, without a touch on the reins, took him to the pasture; but the search of the cañon, that day, was fruitless of results.

The fourth day he rode the driver's other horse. The animal did the same as his companion.

Splendid trailer that he was, Buffalo Bill could

find no track of Silk-Ribbon Sam's away from the cañon, nor could he understand why he had made those pilgrimages there continually.

"I must go to the scene of the massacre," he decided, and the next day he started, accompanied by Nick Sawyer, for the scene of the Redmen's fiendish crime.

CHAPTER V.

THE RED FEATHER.

Buffalo Bill gazed with considerable interest over the trail which had been the run of Silk-Ribbon Sam.

He had been himself a Pony Express Rider when young, and, later, had driven a coach in the Rocky Mountains, so that he could appreciate the skill of the "Ribbon King," as Sam was often also called, in driving over such a trail by day and night.

Added to this was the fact that the run was often visited by Indians on a raid, and bands of road agents were wont to strike different parts of the line from time to time, adding materially to the danger of that particular division of the Overland.

At length Bill and Sawyer reached the scene of the tragedy. The scout dismounted, hitched his horse, and standing where the coach had stood on that fatal day, took in the situation.

For ten minutes he merely looked in silence. His eyes took in the grand sweep of scenery, and then fell upon objects nearer.

Here were the picked bones of the six stage horses.

Over yonder beneath that tree were the graves of the passengers, and a headboard at each marked the name, as entered on the register of the coach line, when they had started on their westward journey.

"There is where the men were in ambush—behind those rocks in that thicket; yonder among those rocks on the right; here on the left under cover of those bushes, and in the rear under shelter of the hill; for the bullet marks in the stagecoach show that it was riddled from four quarters.

"Sam had evidently halted here to give his horses

a breathing spell after their long climb, and to let the passengers have a view of the scenery.

"The attacking party knew of his coming and arranged accordingly.

"Now, to see who were killed."

So saying, he walked over to the graves, five in number, and, taking out pencil and notebook, wrote what was on each headboard.

First was a grave marked:

ANDREW COVERLEY.

Took seat Green Hill—booked to end of line. Baggage robbed, no other clew. Same as others, massacred on this spot.

The next was:

MARY SAUNDERS.

Took seat Green Hill—booked to end of line.

The third was marked simply:

UNKNOWN BOY,
Aged twelve.

The fourth was:

LULU LENNOX.

Girl of thirteen—under care of Andrew Coverley and Mary Saunders.

The fifth was:

UNKNOWN BORDERMAN.

Such was the record of that mountain tragedy, and as the baggage of those slain had been taken or destroyed, more could not be discovered regarding them.

It certainly was a puzzle to solve, as to whether there had been a motive for killing these five people other than for booty.

What brought that man, woman and little girl West, and what were they to each other?

Who was the unknown boy of twelve years of age?

Who was the unknown borderman, and what had he to do with the others?

The scout pondered over all of these things, but said nothing; then he began to look about for "signs."

Who had perpetrated this red work?

It had the look of having been done for an object

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other than mere plunder, for why had all been as the murderers supposed, slaughtered?

There was one survivor, but his brain was now wild with delirium. Would he die with the secret untold?

He alone, apparently, could clear up the mystery, unless one of the murderers came forward and confessed.

The trail was an old one, and yet Buffalo Bill started out to find how the Redmen had come to the mountain, and how they had left it.

He went to work systematically, and with the patience of the Indian.

Nick Sawyer was forced to go back to his station, so left the trail hunter there alone.

Cody sought a camping-place not far away, staked out his horse and then set to work.

The westbound coach passed the second day of his stay, with a new driver in the place of Silk-Ribbon Sam. He handled the reins well, but looked nervous.

He halted for the passengers—for the coach was full—to see the scene of the mysterious massacre, and they appeared to be equally as much interested in the tall form and handsome face of the scout, who, the driver told them, had come there to trail the mystery to the end.

As day travel alone was allowed on that part of the line, the driver waved adieu to Buffalo Bill and drove on, for he had no desire for night to catch him between two stations.

Cody continued his trailing until, suddenly, he stopped and picked up a feather.

It was a feather of crimson hue, an ostrich plume, in fact, and at the end was a clasp, or small gold pin of unique design, representing a hand holding the four aces of a pack of cards!

The catch had been broken off, and this accounted for the dropping of the feather by the wearer, whoever that wearer had been.

Buffalo Bill gazed long at the feather and the pin.

On the reverse side of the latter were two letters, which the scout wrote down in his notebook, and

then placed the red feather and the pin away in his saddle pocket and went on once more, trailing the almost obliterated track left by the assassins on their retreat.

He continued on this trail until nightfall, and then camped on it.

The next day he resumed his search, and late in the afternoon reached a broad trail that led up into a bold range of mountains.

Any other man could scarcely have followed that indistinct trail, for it was left by human feet, not hoofs; but Buffalo Bill did not give it up, and with the instinct of an Indian and the imagination and skill of an intelligent man, he had held on his way, each time when at fault, again finding the track he sought.

When at last he saw whither it led, he seemed to be satisfied on some point, for he boldly mounted his horse and rode leisurely away.

The next morning he rode into a frontier fort, and a cheer from the soldiers and scouts greeted him.

He put up his horse and went straight to the quarters of the commandant, Captain Carrol.

Captain Carrol greeted the chief of scouts warmly.

"What, Bill, back so soon from your detective work?"

"I'll tell you just what I have done, captain, and it seems to me as though my work was just begun," and the scout told the story up to the time of his finding the red feather. He placed his notebook before the officer, open at the names of the people who were slain in the stagecoach.

"Now, Captain Carrol, from the manner in which the attack and murders were carried out, many have believed that Indians were at the bottom of it; but from the first I had an idea that it was the work of white men.

"Now, no Indian had this feather, that is certain; still, the murderers did not go to the scene on horseback, but on foot, which does not look as though they were white men, for white men would not walk, as a general thing.

"They yet could have had only a motive to kill, as

Colonel Cassiday says there was no treasure sent through that day, unless the passengers had a treasure which these murderers knew of."

"That may have been, Cody, and an ally must have been along with the coach," said Captain Carrol, who was deeply interested in the scout's story.

"Yet the books show only the five passengers."

"The borderman might have been the spy."

"If so, they killed him, for he was found dead among the rest."

"True; but go on with your story, for I have every confidence that you can ferret this out, for you are a natural-born detective, Bill."

"Thank you, sir. I followed the trail for sixty miles, until it led up into the Wild Range, and there I left it."

"Lost it?"

"Oh, no; for it had become broader, no pains having been taken to conceal it from a follower, as had been the case up to that time."

"Well?"

"I then branched off and came here to report."

"Not to give it up, I hope?"

"Certainly not, sir; to give up is not my nature; but my tracking them to the Wild Range shows that they must have their rendezvous there."

"There are hostile Indians there, too."

"Yes, sir, and it is the retreat of the Red Riders, too."

"Ha! of that band of road agents that every now and then strike the Overland coaches upon some of their trails?"

"Yes, sir, for you know the Red Riders' trails have always led from the scene of their deviltry to the vicinity of the Wild Range."

"And yet, not a soul has ever been able to trace this band to its retreat, further than that they have a refuge in these mountains, where it would take a regiment to capture a dozen men."

"It is my intention, Captain Carrol, to now undertake the work of finding out these daring men, and, with the aid of a few of my scouts, turned into detectives, I believe I can do it."

"I fear you are going to take too great a risk upon yourself, Cody."

"All life is a risk."

"What is your plan?"

"I will tell you, sir, for I need all the aid you can give me. You have a deserter in the guardhouse—a soldier, who is not unlike me in appearance."

"Yes."

"Now, I would like you to have him secretly removed by night, under a guard of two of my scouts, and taken to another fort, there to be secretly confined in prison; then let the report get out that he has escaped, and offer a reward for him, dead or alive."

"I cannot see your plan, Cody."

"You soon will, sir. I will shave off my hair, mustache and imperial, dress in the deserter's uniform, and make my way to the Wild Range, as though seeking refuge among the Indians or road agents, whichever I come up with first."

"I knew you meant to take some terrible risk."

"Oh, no, sir; for I'll be thought to be Dave Dawson, the deserter, you know. I'll hang about the trail for some time, and I wish some of my men to take passage on each stagecoach, west and east, for the next two weeks, and report to me all that takes place."

"They can do so, with their experience, and when it is done, Surgeon Powell, I know, will bring it to me at a place I will appoint to meet him."

"This may be all useless, and yet it may pan out something of great value."

"Then I will go on my hunt for the retreat of the Red Riders, and see what I can discover."

"I don't like this risk, Cody, I frankly confess."

"I think you exaggerate the danger to me, sir."

"Not at all; I fear you do not see how great the danger really will be."

"A life's a life, sir, and one in my calling must risk it daily."

"I wish, then, Captain Carrol, to detail twelve men, and ask Surgeon Powell to have charge of them. I will take mostly my own men, but I want

also your brave negro servant, Kansas, and Captain Taylor's faithful Chinee, Buckskin, with four soldiers and six of my own picked scouts. These are to be ready to come to my aid when I need them, either singly or all together, for my intention is to make a band of detectives of them, and thus ferret out the lawless men that are a curse to the border.

"By so doing, Captain Carrol, we can rid the Overland of these road agents, and the settlements of horse thieves and marauders."

"It would be a great blessing, Cody, and I will give you all the aid in my power to accomplish the good work, while Surgeon Powell is a tower of strength in himself, and will give you the aid you ask, for you are like brothers."

"When does he return, sir?"

"He went off on a scout for me in your absence and I expect him back at any time."

"If it is Frank Powell you are speaking of, he is here," and into the room stepped a tall, splendid-looking man, wearing the uniform fatigue coat of an army surgeon, but with buckskin leggings stuck in top-boots, and a slouch hat encircled by a gold cord.

It was Surgeon Frank Powell, one who, not content with winning fame in his profession, also gained it as a scout and Indian fighter, and who is known today as the "border brother of Buffalo Bill," the "Surgeon Scout," "Wizard Medicine Man" and "Fancy Frank."

"Sit down, Powell, for we were just speaking of you. Bill, here, requires your aid," said Captain Carrol.

"Thanks, captain, and let me report that in my three days' scout I saw but one Indian—here's his scalp—for we had a duel at long range, he taking first shot, and there were no signs of comrades near him.

"Now, Bill, old fellow, what is it?" and the Surgeon Scout tossed the redskin's scalp over on the captain's table.

"I've turned detective, Frank, and need some allies, so I've asked for you, four soldiers, six of my

men, and Kansas, the captain's servant, and Buckskin, Captain Taylor's Chinee."

"What such a dozen can't find out, Bill, with you as chief, won't be worth knowing," remarked Powell, laughing.

"I want men whom no one will suspect, and yet who can do their work well, when thrown into any position.

"You will have to go and take charge of that poor wounded driver, Silk-Ribbon Sam, and the others are to leave their posts along the Overland, and report everything to you, and I'll find a way for you to communicate with me.

"If I need my scout detectives, mounted and ready for work, I know you can come to me with them on short notice."

"I'll do it, Bill, and luck be with you in solving the mystery of that stagecoach murder case, which Captain Carrol told me all about; but, when do you start?"

"As soon as I have picked my men and let them know just what is to be done," was the reply.

At midnight Cody made his arrangements, and slipped out of camp in the uniform of a soldier. With his long hair cut close to his head, and his face beardless, no one would have recognized the noted scout, for he had sacrificed beauty to duty, and had started upon a trail that was beset with the greatest dangers.

CHAPTER VI.

SAM'S ESCAPE.

Tips, the stable boy who was nursing the mad driver in his delirium, was a good nurse, and attended devotedly to his work—that of caring for the wounded and very sick Silk-Ribbon Sam.

As the days passed the fever began to abate, and Dr. Dunn, the landlord, physician and boss of the station, decided that the patient would recover.

In his delirium he had uttered many things, which Tips had religiously written down.

A leaf from the book the nurse had kept of the

wandering mind finding utterance in words was strange reading, for in it occurred these apparently incoherent sentences:

Trickery! yes—guilty?
 Crime! do not breathe it here—wait!
 I would cut my veins open and let out the blood if it was the same as his!
 A gambler! oh, yes—very bad!
 Too late! Too late! I have myself to blame.
 I fled and why? God knows best!
 Who am I? I dare not tell.
 What am I? A gentleman—no, I forget, a wanderer, a vagabond—no, no, I forget. I am Silk-Ribbon Sam, the Mad Driver of the Rockies.
 I guess I am mad—ha! all dead! the treasure gone!
 I saw them as they fired!
 Red faces! red forms! with red feathers—all were red, and blood is red.
 God! I recall no more!
 Ha! yes, I remember now.
 My horses shot down! my people dead, my treasure gone!
 Yes, I guess I am mad; but I can drive, I can kill, I can avenge—ha! ha! ha!

Such was a page record of the driver's ravings, and with slight changes they were repeated day and night. According to Buffalo Bill's instructions, the watchers wrote all down, skipping no word, for much might hang on a word.

Days passed and at length the fever left the patient. He seemed much better, ate well, but said nothing.

"My God! I fear his reason is gone," cried the doctor, one day, as he looked at the man, who seemed unconscious of his presence.

When spoken to, Sam promptly replied, if questioned as to how he felt, or what he wished to eat; but if asked about the massacre he looked the questioner squarely in the face and remained silent.

He improved daily, gained in strength, and finally moved about in a quiet way.

One night Tips, who slept in the room with him, was not disturbed in his slumber by any sound, but in the morning he awoke with a start, for the driver was gone!

Tips gave the alarm, and search was at once begun, but it was fruitless. Sam had dressed himself, carried with him his weapons and had departed.

The whole settlement turned out in the search, and yet not a trace of him could be found.

"The poor fellow is mad, gone clean mad, and God knows what will happen to him, or what he may do," was the doctor's heartfelt exclamation.

Having lost his patient, Tips determined to return to Danger Station and report to Nick Sawyer that the head driver was gone.

As he was riding along the trail he saw a horseman approaching.

He drew rein, for those were hazardous times, and it behooved all lone riders to be on guard.

The horseman was splendidly mounted, sat his horse like a Comanche, and wore a semi-uniform, half-buckskin suit, while upon his broad shoulders were straps, denoting an army officer's rank.

Tips felt reassured and moved on, the stranger not having stopped at all.

As he drew near, the stranger said, politely:
 "Good-day, my friend! Can you tell me how far it is to the stage station?"

"Seven miles by the trail, sir."

"Thank you, and perhaps you are from there?"

"Jist lit out a hour ago."

"Is there a wounded stage driver there by the name of Silk-Ribbon Sam?"

"There were until last night, but he skipped off last night."

"Died?"

"Nary! He jest lit out."

"Pray tell me all about him, for I am an army surgeon sent to look after him. I am Surgeon Frank Powell."

"Lordy! I has heerd of yer, Pard Doctor, as who hain't?"

"You is no slouch, but a man from 'way up, and I'm as tickled to meet yer as though I'd swallowed a feather."

Frank Powell said the pleasure was reciprocated, heard the story of the mad driver, and turned back with Tips for Danger Station.

Arriving there Surgeon Powell was presented to Nick Sawyer, and the news told to all that Silk-Ribbon Sam, as mad as a wolf, had eluded all watching,

and had gone, no one knew where, and carried with him his belt of arms.

"You are sure that he was mad?" asked Powell, addressing Tips.

"I guesses he were, for not a word would he say but 'yes' an' 'no,' and ef yer axed him about ther massacre, he did give yer a look out o' his eyes that made yer oncomfortable.

"Old Pills said as how he was mad as a March hare, whatever that means."

"And who is Pills?" asked Powell, with a smile.

Tips had just explained that "Pills" was Dr. Dunn, landlord and agent, when Nick Sawyer called out:

"There comes the coach, and on time for the first time since Sam quit driving. Buck Riley's improving."

"And he's a-comin' fer all he's worth, as Sam uster come," Tips added.

"Lordy! jist hear that horn wind! Hain't it like Sam's way?" cried one of the men, as the sound of a horn was heard ringing down the mountain pass.

"There she comes!" cried several voices, and the stagecoach, drawn by six horses, rolled into view, coming along at a slapping pace.

Then there broke forth from all a cry of horror, for on the box they recognized the mad driver, Silk-Ribbon Sam.

CHAPTER VII.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

Buck Riley was one of the best drivers on the Overland, but he, like all the rest, excepting Silk-Ribbon Sam, had spurned the piece of road beyond Danger Station.

It was a bad road by day, and by night it was a desperate drive.

But Sam had driven it without accident until the day of the fatal scene on the mountain top.

Then Buck Riley, when volunteers were called for to take the coach over that run, had reluctantly said

that he would drive if it was arranged to make it all by daylight.

He was given the coach on these terms, and went to work, the change making several hours' difference in the time, but this could not be helped under the circumstances.

Buck had a stage full of passengers going eastward.

He was jogging along the trail at a slow pace when they came to the mountain road, and the horses began to climb.

Buck Riley was fond of talking, and he generally got some one to ride on the box with him when he could; but no passengers cared to ride there through that piece of road.

They preferred to take the chances within of being shot.

When Buck got to the mountain, on the summit of which the massacre had occurred, he intended to give his passengers a treat.

He wished them to see the fine view, and then to tell them of the sad killing of those in the stagecoach and how the poor driver had been wounded and gone mad.

Buck had all in his mind just what he was going to say, and was drawing rein upon the mountain top, when suddenly, out from behind the large tree, where were the graves of the dead, stepped a tall form.

He held a rifle in his hand, and it was leveled at Buck Riley.

"Halt!"

The word rung out as sternly as though given to a regiment in battle.

Buck Riley obeyed with an alacrity that was amusing, while from his lips broke the words:

"The mad driver, sure as death!"

"Make your brake fast, throw your reins over the lantern and dismount."

The passengers were in dire alarm.

Of course they thought road agents had stopped the coach.

One or two men who had been talking about what

they would do, if attacked, now turned white and slunk back in their seats.

No one seemed to have courage to look out of the windows, and, brought to bay as he was, Buck Riley was more than anxious to obey the commands given him.

He got down with considerable haste, after having made his brake fast and thrown the ends of the reins over the lantern.

But he got down on the opposite side to the mad driver.

The latter walked quickly to the coach, sprung upon the box, took his seat, and, paying no more attention to Buck Riley, drove on.

Poor Buck had taken refuge behind a bowlder and saw the coach roll off with a sinking heart.

All he could do was to follow on foot.

The passengers were at a loss to understand the situation.

They had been halted but not robbed, and now were moving on once more, and at a brisker pace than before.

One of the brave men who was going to do so much in case of an attack, and had simply subsided, now felt his courage rise, and said, pompously:

"I'll see if that was the driver's joke to attempt to scare us."

He leaned far out of the window, and sternly said: "Driver, what did that mean a while——"

He dodged his head in again with a suddenness that gave him a blow which knocked his hat off.

But the coach did not stop for the hat.

"What is it?" gasped several in chorus.

"It's not the driver."

"What?"

This was in chorus.

"It's not our driver," whispered the man.

"Who is it?"

"A road agent. We are being kidnaped, I think."

Every face in the coach was white with terror.

They were expecting another massacre, this time down in the valley.

"I say, driver, where are you going?" called out

one man, screwing up his courage to the sticking point.

Silk-Ribbon Sam gave him a look, that was all.

He made no reply, and the man asked no more questions.

The whole party sat within, alarmed, in suspense and waiting to see what was going to happen.

"He drives well," said one.

"He drives recklessly, I think," another remarked.

"Far more rapidly than our other driver."

"Oh, yes, he sends 'em along at a peert gait, and knows how to drive 'em; but them road agents kin do anything they wants to," an old timer remarked.

At last from the box came the winding of the stage horn, notifying those at Danger Station to be ready with the relay of horses.

The passengers certainly gave the strange driver credit for playing the horn well, but they looked upon it as a signal to his brother road agents that he had brought them game to pick.

A few moments after the coach drew up at Danger Station and the passengers breathed freely, for they felt that after all they were safe, and that what had occurred back on the mountain had been but a joke after all.

CHAPTER VIII.

RESUMING THE RIBBONS.

It was a most startling surprise to all at the station to see the coach dash up with the mad driver upon the box.

Silk-Ribbon Sam looked pale and haggard, and yet he seemed to be in full possession of his faculties.

He nodded to Nick Sawyer, unbuckled the reins, and threw them down, but did not leave the box, while the stable boys were putting fresh horses to the coach.

The men looked at Nick Sawyer, and then up at Silk-Ribbon Sam.

The passengers looked out of the windows, and one asked:

"Is it all right, boss, for thet hain't our driver up there?"

And he pointed up at the box.

"Where is Buck Riley, Sam?" asked Nick Sawyer, after Surgeon Powell had whispered something to him.

"I left him on Red Top."

"Did he kill him?" asked Sawyer, in a whisper, of one of the passengers.

"No; or I didn't see him do it, nor hear any shot."

"Who is he?" asked another of the passengers.

"Silk-Ribbon Sam, and he is just out from a severe illness, and, you notice, has been wounded."

"He's mad."

"We fear so."

"For God's sake, don't let him drive us."

"I'll not."

And Nick Sawyer said:

"Sam, I'm glad to see you out; but you are not well enough to drive yet, so let one of the boys relieve you until your return trip."

"No; I drive."

There was a look in the eyes that meant mischief if urged, and yet Nick Sawyer felt that he must do his duty and remove Silk-Ribbon Sam from the box, and he was about to attempt it when Surgeon Powell, who had been watching the driver closely, feeling that there would be serious trouble, said:

"Remember, Mr. Sawyer, I paid for a seat on the box, so will go on with Silk-Ribbon Sam, of whom I have so often heard."

And, with a significant look at Nick Sawyer, he sprung upon the box by the side of the driver.

"Glad to meet you, sir, as we are to go together."

"I am Surgeon Powell, of the army."

And he held forth his hand.

Sam took it in silence; the horses were ready now and he called out:

"Hand me the ribbons, Tips!"

At a motion from Surgeon Powell, Tips obeyed.

"All ready!" shouted Silk-Ribbon Sam, and the stage rolled away, the passengers greatly relieved by the whisper from Nick Sawyer that:

"It's all right; the Surgeon Scout is with yer."

Away went the six horses at a rattling pace, Sam driving in his old way, and winning the admiration of Frank Powell, who for some time watched him in silence.

Then he said:

"I have heard of your wonderful driving, my friend, and feel that you have not been too highly praised."

"You must have driven from boyhood?"

"I have," was the laconic response.

"Where did you learn to drive so well?"

"At home."

"You have always lived West?"

"No."

"Ah! from the East; so am I, or rather, I was born in New York State; but have been a borderman since my boyhood."

"It's a wild life we lead here, Sam."

"Yes."

"Do you know Buffalo Bill?"

"Never met him."

"He is our greatest frontiersman, and you should know him."

"May, some day."

"By the way, it was you who had the coach the day the passengers were killed on Red Top?"

The face of Silk-Ribbon Sam paled and his eyes flashed.

He seemed deeply moved, and Surgeon Powell was watching him closely, though not appearing to do so.

"You were the man, for it was Silk-Ribbon Sam, I heard?"

"Yes, see there!"

He raised his sombrero and revealed the wound, which was barely healed.

"The road agents must have fired on you from ambush?"

Silk-Ribbon Sam made no reply, but his face worked convulsively.

Surgeon Powell saw that it was best not to speak

more upon the subject and excite him, so he changed the subject and asked:

"Do you intend to continue to drive on the line?"

"Yes."

"But not over your old run?"

"Yes! yes!" he said, almost fiercely.

"Why did you go to Red Top to resume your driving?"

The mad driver passed his hand over his head as though not wholly understanding the question, and replied, slowly:

"I left my stage at Red Top—went back there to take it."

Surgeon Powell pressed him no more.

His knowledge of the human mind and body told him that Silk-Ribbon Sam was then at least a wreck.

Physically he was all right, and mentally he would go through all duties devolving upon him as regarded the work he had been doing.

Attempt to remove him and he would become a raving maniac.

Let him alone and he would perhaps recover in time.

The wound, and what he had witnessed that awful day on the mountain, had proven to be a shock sufficient to unseat his mind.

When the next station was reached the people there were amazed indeed to see Sam on the box.

But, with the cunning of madness, he would not dismount, fearing they would prevent his return, and, leaping down, Surgeon Powell explained to the keeper the situation.

"I will get blamed for trusting the coach to a madman," he said.

"I will be responsible, and the passengers, you see, do not demur."

"All right, go ahead with him," was the answer, and Sam drove on once more, a pleased look upon his face.

The next station was the one which, in his flight from the mountain, he had gone to instead of where he lived.

Here was the agent in charge of that division of

the road, and in driving by Danger Station Silk-Ribbon Sam seemed to have realized the fact that he must go on to the settlement and have it understood whether he was to drive or not.

So on to the settlement he went, and a cry went up on the arrival of the coach, as he was recognized.

Here Sam left the box and entered the hotel, while Surgeon Powell quickly called Dr. Dunn aside, explained to him that he came from Buffalo Bill to see after the mad driver, and ended by saying:

"I met Tips and turned back, and Sam drove up while there. He went back to Red Top, where he left the stage, to resume his duties, and my advice is to let him have the coach. He is harmless now, but it would make him a raving lunatic to deprive him of the coach. He attends strictly to his work, and so will continue to do, I pledge you."

"You know best, Surgeon Powell, and my own knowledge of medicine teaches me that you are right; so I'll let him take the coach back to Danger Station, and his own is about finished, for I have had it fully repaired, and he can take that again and resume his old runs from Danger Station westward and back."

"Doctor, I'll bear it in mind. Tell the poor fellow you wish him to resume duty again, for it will cheer him up, and I'll ride back to Danger Station with him when he goes, and return on my horse, for I am to camp with you for a while, according to the wishes of Buffalo Bill."

"Now isn't that good news to me, to have you with me; but I'll go and see Sam, and the coach rolls out again to-morrow, for this is his one-day stop-over trip, the next giving him two days at Danger Station."

And the doctor left in search of Sam, whose face brightened up at the good news.

CHAPTER IX.

BUCK RILEY SEEKS REVENGE.

When the stage rolled away, leaving Buck Riley on Red Top, near the graves of the murdered passen-

gers, he hastened to put space between himself and the weird spot as quickly as possible.

Buck was a brave man, that is, he was a bold driver, and could take his part in any fracas.

He had killed several men in personal affairs, and had the reputation of being a man whom it was dangerous to fool with, and I guess he was just that.

But Buck Riley was devoured with superstition. He believed if a rabbit ran across his trail it was bad luck.

If he heard an owl hooting alongside at night, Buck was sure some one would die soon, and he was right, for, for every hoot of an owl a person dies, but they would have died all the same had the owl not hooted.

To shudder without seeming cause Buck said was a sign that some one was walking over the spot where you were to be buried.

Then he believed firmly in ghosts and spooks, and said that he had seen them.

With all these superstitions, Buck hastened to get away from Red Top.

After he did so his superstitions gave place to anger.

He detested walking. It was too much like work, he was wont to say.

And yet he had fifteen long miles to walk to Danger Station.

He got madder as he progressed, and he trudged on, wondering how he had been so cleverly managed by the mad driver.

"I'll get even with him, now, you bet!

"The boys will have it in for me; but I'll make some of them regret laughing at Buck Riley."

And so he trudged on, having here and there to ford a stream, climb a hill or go through a muddy bit of lowlands.

When at last Buck arrived in sight of the station he was at fever heat.

He was mad clean through, and he saw the group as he advanced, footsore and weary, taking far more interest in him than he cared to have them do.

"Hello, Buck, you is in?" cried one.

"What about Mad Sam gettin' ther coach from yer?"

"Did he make yer come down with a gun?"

Such were the questions that greeted him, and yet he answered none, only asked:

"Whar's Nick Sawyer?"

"I'm here, Buck," and Sawyer came out of the cabin.

"Nick, when I struck Red Top, Silk-Ribbon Sam were thar layin' fer me.

"He hed his rifle coverin' me, and told me to git down.

"I got down, and he got up and druv off, leavin' me on ther mountain, and I tells yer squar' I are on ther warpath and mean ter hev it out with him."

"Don't be angry, Buck, for poor Sam is crazy, clean gone, I fear."

"Whar is he?"

"Gone on to the settlement with the coach."

"Why didn't Tips take her on?"

"Sam kept the box while here, and Surgeon Powell from the fort, who was here, thought it best to let him go on."

"Waal, when he comes back, he's got ter fight, fer I hain't no child ter be played with."

"Do nothing rash, Buck, or you may regret it; but tell me just how it all occurred."

Buck Riley told his story, and, seeing the ill-humor he was in, none of the boys cared to joke him about his walk from Red Top.

The next day he was in no better humor, and all feared trouble upon the return of the coach if Silk-Ribbon Sam should come back with it.

As the time drew near for the coming of the coach, Tips started off down the trail to meet it, determined to put Sam on his guard.

But he came to a sudden halt, as he heard behind him a rapid step, and the words:

"Hold on, thar, Tips, for ef yer goes ter play any dirt on me, I'll put a bullet clean through yer.

"Come back to ther cabin, or I shoots."

"I'm not afraid of you, Buck Riley; but you has the drop on me and so I obeys," and Tips returned,

while all others became more interested in what they were sure would soon happen.

Nick Sawyer could do no more than warn Buck, and said:

"I've advised you for your good, Buck, and if you pick a quarrel with a man whose reason has left him you'll regret it."

"I'll take ther chances o' regrettin'," was the response, and just then the sound of the stage horn came floating up from the valley.

"That's Sam, for no other can blow a horn like him," said Nick Sawyer, and he watched for the stage to come in sight.

Soon it appeared, and the mad driver was on the box, and by his side sat Surgeon Frank Powell.

There was a silence upon all at the station, and every eye was turned upon Buck Riley.

He sat on a bench, pale, silent and with glaring eyes.

When he had been confronted on Red Top by the mad driver he had not had the pluck to face him with a trial of strength.

But, jeered at by his companions, after his long walk, he had plotted mischief and meant to force the mad driver to meet him, determined that he would see to it that he, Buck Riley, had the advantage.

Up dashed the stage to the station, and it was crowded with passengers.

The doors were thrown open, the passengers sprung out to stretch their legs for the quarter of an hour halt, and the stable boys went to unhitch the team and replace it by fresh animals.

Silk-Ribbon Sam did not look well.

His face was white and haggard, he had a strange light in his eyes, almost fierce it was, and his toilet was the same which he had had on at the massacre, and was blood-stained and torn.

It was in strange contrast to his usually almost foppish appearance which had gotten for him, along with that of Silk-Ribbon Sam, the name of the "Dandy Driver of the Rockies."

Frank Powell dismounted from the box leisurely.

He saw that something was the matter, but just what he could not divine.

Then Silk-Ribbon Sam dismounted and started toward his cabin without noticing any one.

As he did so, Buck Riley sprung from his bench, revolver in hand, and shouted out:

"Say, Ribbon Sam, that was a durned mean game yer played on me up on Red Top, and yer has got ter pay fer it, for I'm on ther warpath wuss nor a mad wolf."

Silk-Ribbon Sam had not halted, had not even looked toward the speaker, who, maddened at being ignored, threw his revolver to a level and fired at him, although the back of the mad driver was toward him.

The bullet turned the hat of Silk-Ribbon Sam half around on his head, but it seemed to turn the wearer entirely around, and so quick was his action that no one seemed to know just how it all occurred.

But the shot from Sam's revolver followed that of Buck Riley in a second, and ere the frightened passengers could rush to a place of safety, ere Powell and Nick Sawyer could interfere, Buck Riley was a dead man.

He fell in his tracks, his revolver in his hand exploding a second time as he went down, while Silk-Ribbon Sam walked quietly on toward his cabin.

A bullet wound in the center of his forehead told Surgeon Powell that there was no need of his services.

"I feared trouble, but I did not expect it would end this way.

"Buck was awful quick, but Sam was lightning, and he's not to blame.

"Come, boys, take Buck's body out o' sight o' ther passengers, who ain't used to our little games o' life and death out here," said Nick Sawyer.

The passengers, all from the East, were huddled together in a group, their faces pale with alarm.

They had seen a border duel, and its consequences were before them.

They had been in raptures over the magnificent driving of Silk-Ribbon Sam up from the settlement,

and they had just seen him show what he could do when brought to bay.

He disappeared in his cabin, while the body of Buck Riley was removed by the stable boys, and Surgeon Powell and Nick Sawyer walked apart for a talk together.

"That was quickly done, Sawyer," said Powell, as the two walked apart.

"Yes, it was a second's work, and Buck Riley got his deserts, for he meant to kill Sam against all I could say, and I shall so report it, for the rules of the company are very severe against its people fighting."

"I am witness to the fact that Sam acted only to save his life; but how cool he was about it."

"Yes, indeed, surgeon; but what do you think of him?"

"He's a most remarkable man."

"Clean gone in the head?"

"No, not as bad as that; but the wound and the shock have deranged him, and upon that subject he is silent."

"He has nothing to say about it and gets excited if I refer to it, so it is best to let him go on in his own way."

"But can he be trusted?"

"Wholly, my word on it for that."

"Then I'm to let him go on?"

"Certainly, for that has already been decided."

"He keeps his coach, and humor him in his queer ways, and warn the boys to say nothing to fret him, or to refer to the murder on Red Top."

"I shall see to it that they do not."

"But are you going on?"

"No, I shall return to the settlement on horseback, and I have certain instructions for you, and will quarter a man with you for awhile, and he is to be taken as an assistant, for I must tell you, Sawyer, that we are going to rid this road of outlaws or Indians, who make it a terror now."

"I'm glad of that, surgeon."

"Buffalo Bill is the mover in it, and I must let you into the secret in part, and no one else at the station

must suspect that the new man comes for aught else than to work."

"I see."

"Now, I will write a note, if you will give me pen, ink and paper."

These were provided, and when Surgeon Powell came out of the cabin he found the time was up.

He went up and spoke to several of the passengers, told them that all would go well for the rest of the trip, and not to feel any anxiety.

Then Silk-Ribbon Sam appeared, coming from his cabin.

He looked his very best, though the wound on his forehead still left a red mark.

He had a handsome sombrero on his head, encircled by a cord of miniature silk reins, buckles and all, and he wore a velvet jacket, buckskin leggings, fringed, beaded and stuck in handsome top-boots.

About his waist was a silk sash of crimson, and it but half hid the revolvers in the belt underneath.

Upon his hands, as had always been his custom, were buckskin gantlets.

Certainly, Silk-Ribbon Sam was gotten up in his best rig, whatever his sorrows or suffering might be.

"By Jupiter! get onto him!" said Nick Sawyer, with delight, addressing Powell.

"He's a superb-looking fellow," Surgeon Powell responded, and then he asked, in a low tone:

"Sawyer, do you know if the coach carried any treasure the day of the murder?"

"Not unless it belonged to the pilgrims inside."

Silk-Ribbon Sam now approached the station boss, seemingly unconscious of attracting any attention, and asked:

"Any orders, Pard Sawyer?"

"None, Sam, for you know your work."

The driver bowed, and with a nod to Surgeon Powell, sprung upon the box.

The passengers hastened to take their seats, and the stagecoach rolled away, just five minutes late in leaving Danger Station.

There had been one or two passengers who had

wished to ride on the box, but there was something in the look of the mad driver that deterred them from asking, and they contented themselves with remaining inside and enjoying the grand scenery from that point of observation.

The road over which the coach sped along was, as has been said, a dangerous one, and at places the passengers fairly held their breath with awe and dread.

But the six horses moved along unswervingly, the wheels of the coach were guided unerringly by the master hand on the ribbons.

The next station was reached, and in five minutes fresh horses were attached, the axles were greased, and the coach rolled on once more, Silk-Ribbon Sam speaking no word other than to ask the station boss if he had any orders.

The latter had been down to Danger Station the day before and understood the situation, so said nothing, and a note along the line sent by a courier from Nick Sawyer had instructed the agents how to act toward the mad driver.

Then came the climb of the mountain up to Red Top.

The face of the driver became stern and white as he neared the fatal spot.

But he held slowly on up the mountain, the admiration of the passengers increasing as they neared the top, and bursting forth in loud praise as the coach halted to breathe the horses.

It had halted in the very spot where the volley came that brought such death and destruction.

The passengers saw the five graves, and they knew that the man on the box had been the driver when the fearful tragedy had happened.

They knew that his mind had been upset, and they asked no word, for they had been warned not to do so by Surgeon Powell.

They were surprised then, when Silk-Ribbon Sam leaned over from the box and said, as he pointed with his gold-handled whip:

"This is Red Top, and the scene of the massacre of those in the stagecoach some time ago.

"Yonder are the graves of the victims."

Not a word came in reply.

The passengers dared not ask a question.

Then the stage moved on once more, and it had almost reached the graves, when it came to a halt.

Something barred the way.

Heads were thrust out of the window as a stern voice cried:

"Halt!"

In the trail stood a single person, a man in the uniform of a cavalry soldier.

He held a repeating rifle in his hand and faced the mad driver.

"Who are you?"

The question was calmly asked by Silk-Ribbon Sam, whose hand toyed with the butt of one of the holster revolvers on each side of the box.

"I am here under orders from the commandant of the fort, to search your coach for a man who is wanted for certain reasons," said the soldier.

"Show your authority," said Sam, coolly.

The soldier patted his rifle.

"That is not enough, and I will submit to no interference with my passengers until I know that you are authorized to do so."

Silk-Ribbon Sam had suddenly dropped the border dialect manner of speaking, and his words were firmly uttered and to the point.

"I am perfectly willing, sir, to give you my authority, as you are in the discharge of your duty.

"You have a passenger on your coach who bears the name of Ned Marsden.

"He is wanted at the fort, and here is my authority to take him," and the soldier drew from his pocket a paper bearing the army stamp and seal, and handed it up to the driver.

Silk-Ribbon Sam read the official paper, and said:

"I yield, sir, and you can take your man."

The soldier stepped to the stagecoach, threw the door open and said:

"Ned Marsden, you are wanted.

"Come out quietly, and save trouble."

The one he addressed was a man of thirty, slender,

almost boyish-looking, and wore the garb of the East.

His face paled as he heard his name called, and he thrust his hand into his bosom, when one of his fellow passengers said, quickly:

"Don't be a fool, for that soldier has his company to back him."

"He said nothing, and when the soldier called to him to get out he obeyed in silence.

"I am sorry to have alarmed you, gentlemen," said the soldier, politely, and then, addressing himself to Sam, he continued:

"I thank you, sir.

"You can drive on now."

Silk-Ribbon Sam chirped his horses, and the coach rolled on, leaving the passenger standing in the trail and under guard of the soldier who had so cleverly made him a prisoner.

The soldier was Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER X.

THE CAPTURED OUTLAW.

The scout had been on a lone trail endeavoring to locate the Red-men who had held up the coach of Silk-Ribbon Sam.

He had been unable to trail them to their lair, and he had finally lit upon the idea that perhaps some of the outlaws had conceived the idea of going as passengers on the coaches.

While he was pondering this idea in his mind he received a dispatch, sent from an old scout pard of his, Wild Bill. It read as follows:

An outlaw, wanted by the hangman in these parts, has left for your part of the country. He travels by the Overland line, under the name of Ned Marsden. Look out for him Bill. They say he's the head of a band of road agents over in your section.

A grim smile spread over the scout's face as he read these lines.

"I will search every coach that passes and watch every passenger who is unable to give a good and satisfactory account of himself."

As the coach appeared around the bend in the road a few hours later he drew his horse up, facing it, and called the driver to a halt, with the result told above.

When Silk-Ribbon Sam drove away from the graves on Red Top, he glanced over his shoulder and saw the soldier still standing in the trail before him

with the passenger whom he had taken from the stagecoach.

As the coach disappeared the passenger asked hoarsely:

"Who are you, and why have you committed this outrage?"

"You ask who I am.

"Do you not know?"

"I do not know, though your face does have a familiar look."

"Look well at me."

"I do."

"Have we never met before?"

"I do not recall where."

"Have you ever been to the fort commanded by Captain Carrol?"

"No," and the man started.

"I think you have forgotten——"

"I am on my trip West for the first time."

"Where do you hail from, Mr. Marsden?"

"I am from the East."

"What is your name?"

"Dan Dudley."

"Why did you not correct me just now when I called you Mr. Marsden, and when I asked if one bearing such name was not in the stage?"

The man bit his lips, but remained silent.

"Your name on the stage books is Ned Marsden."

"How do you know?"

"No matter; but tell me if you recall me when I say we met last at the fort?"

"What fort?"

"I told you, the outpost commanded by Captain Louis Carrol?"

"I do not remember you."

"I am called Buffalo Bill."

The man started visibly, and then his face flushed under the penetrating gaze of the scout.

"The last time we met, Mr. Ned Marsden, was on the trail. You were dressed in the uniform of a cavalryman, well-mounted, and was on your way to the fort. We rode on together, you bearing dispatches. You remained a day at the fort, said that you came from Colonel Miles' post, and while there you spoke to a lady who said that she had met you some years before in the East.

"That night you departed, carrying dispatches from Captain Carrol to Colonel Miles. Those dis-

patches never reached the colonel, sir, so what became of them?"

"You are mistaken in the man, and you are not Buffalo Bill, for he was a scout, with long hair, mustache and imperial."

"Ah! your tongue gives you away, Mr. Marsden, or how do you know that Buffalo Bill is such a person as you describe?"

"I have seen his picture."

"You are mistaken, for, living on the plains all my life, I have not had my picture taken."

"You are the man I seek, and I was sure of it, when word came to me three hours ago that one Ned Marsden had taken passage at a station for the West. I had heard the name, and when I saw you I recognized you as the courier who had brought what purported to be dispatches to Captain Carrol. Now, those dispatches were bogus, and stopped Captain Carrol from sending out a squadron, as he had intended to do, and gave the Red Riders, or Red-men, as they are called, a chance to make a ten-strike for booty upon a Government paymaster. The dispatches given you were not delivered, and you are the man whom I seek."

"I am not, and you cannot prove it."

"I wish no better proof than my own eyes."

"Have you ever heard of the Red-men?"

"No."

"Have you ever heard of the Red Riders?"

"I have heard of a band of outlaws of that name who infest the Overland Trails."

"Do you know what I believe?"

"No, and do not care."

"I believe you are the spy of the Red-men."

The man became livid and dug his nails nervously into the palms of his hands.

"I am sure that you are a Red-man, Red Rider, or whatever other name you care to be known by; you belong to that band of cutthroats, and I have captured you to offer you terms."

"I defy you to prove your charge against me, which is infamous."

Buffalo Bill smiled, and, suddenly dropping his revolver full upon the heart of the man, he cried, sternly:

"Hands up, sir!"

The hands were raised sullenly.

Then the scout said, while he held his revolver in one hand:

"This weapon is cocked and my finger upon the trigger, so beware not to force me to kill you."

"If you resist I will do so."

"See here!"

He tore open the coat of the man as he spoke and revealed in the scarf about his neck a strange pin.

It corresponded exactly to the pin the scout had found on the trail.

The scout had disarmed him, and the prisoner was utterly at his mercy.

"Do you intend to accept my terms?" asked Buffalo Bill, after examining the pin.

"What are they?"

"Life in the one case, death in the other."

"What am I to do?"

"You are to betray your comrades."

"I will not do it."

"You are to lead me, secretly, and alone, to the retreat of the Red-men, show me how to reach their camp. You are to tell me just how many there are, and all about them. Then I shall tie and gag you, and, finding out for myself whether you have told the truth, will return to you. If you have deceived me, I take you to the fort to be hanged. If you have told the truth, I will take you with me to the settlement and leave you there under guard for two days, while I go with a force to capture the Red-men. Then you are to be released to go where you will, except to remain here on the border, for, if you do that, I shall kill you at sight wherever I find you. Now, sir, you know the terms I offer, and it remains for you to say whether you accept or refuse them."

"I refuse."

"You refuse."

"I do."

"Remember your fate."

"I can die but once."

"And you die by the gallows!"

"So be it, I care not what way I die, if die I must."

"You had better consider."

"I will not betray my chief and comrades."

"You mean this?"

"I do."

"Irrevocably?"

"Irrevocably."

"Then I pity you, for die you must."

"Come with me!"

The man silently obeyed, the scout walking back into the heavy timber, firmly grasping the arm of the prisoner.

CHAPTER XI.

SINGLE-HANDED.

It was the day after the taking of the prisoner from the coach that Silk-Ribbon Sam came back on his return trip to Danger Station.

He had made the run in safety, speaking only when necessary for him to do so, and yet carrying out every duty that devolved upon him.

Never had he driven better, and he was on time on arrivals and departures to the minute.

As he reached Red Top on his return he saw the soldier, as he supposed Buffalo Bill to be, standing by the group of graves awaiting him.

Near him was the prisoner whom he had taken from the coach the day before. Buffalo Bill had searched him carefully a second time and found, besides the pin, a map which he thought would guide him to the hiding place of the Red-men.

This had been concealed in the sole of one of his boots, and the outlaw turned pale when it was drawn forth.

Silk-Ribbon Sam drew up when the scout motioned him to do so.

He had read a paper the scout carried, and he knew from whence it came.

"Driver, you are to take this prisoner to the settlement station, and deliver him into the hands of Surgeon Powell of the army, who is now there.

"Should the surgeon be away, deliver him to Dr. Dunn, the agent, with instructions to hold him until Powell comes.

"Here is a letter to Surgeon Powell, and you will please give the prisoner a seat on the box with you."

"All right, sir," replied Silk-Ribbon Sam, and he made room for the prisoner, whom Buffalo Bill ordered to mount the box, and then bound there securely, hands and feet.

There were four passengers in the coach, all of them bordermen from their looks, and they gazed in silence upon what was going on.

Ned Marsden, the prisoner, uttered no word, and he quietly obeyed every order given him by the scout.

Taking the letter from Buffalo Bill, Silk-Ribbon

Sam thrust it into his pocket and drove off without another word.

The stage rolled on its way, and engrossed with the steep, dangerous descent of the mountain, Silk-Ribbon Sam failed to notice that every now and then a head would peer out of one window or the other of the coach, and make a sign to the prisoner, who almost constantly glanced behind him.

Suddenly a head appeared from each window, then the shoulders, next the body, and two men drew themselves up on top of the coach.

Creeping toward the box, one of them raised his revolver and brought it down heavily upon the head of the driver.

But a lurch of the coach and sudden movement of Silk-Ribbon Sam saved him from instant death.

As it was, the blow half stunned him, and, rising, a lurch of the coach threw him from the box.

He fell into a thicket, while with a yell of triumph the man who had sought to kill him sprung to the seat he had vacated and grasped the reins.

The horses were moved forward at a quicker pace, while the other man on top of the coach cried out:

"We've saved yer, pard."

He addressed the prisoner, and his companion who held the reins added:

"Sure as shootin' we has, and got ther coach, too.

"We'll set yer free when we reaches ther valley, for that mad driver may not be much hurt and foller."

The stage rolled on in its winding trail until, rounding the head of a cañon, the trail formed a perfect horseshoe, going back within a hundred yards of the spot where Silk-Ribbon Sam had been hurled from the box.

There the trail led close alongside of a ledge of rocks rising some six feet above the top of the coach.

Suddenly over the ledge was thrust a revolver, a sharp report followed, and another in quick succession, and the two wheel-horses went down with a bullet in their brains.

Then came a third shot, and the driver fell to the ground a dead man, and upon the top of the coach from the ledge leaped Silk-Ribbon Sam, who had taken a short cut across country and come out on the coach trail again ahead of the coach, while at the same instant he hurled the second man to the ground, where he lay in a heap, like one badly hurt.

"Hand out your weapons, or I will kill you!"

The words were addressed to the two men in the coach.

"We hain't no fools, pard, for we kin play a game of ball as well as you!" said one.

The response of the driver from where he crouched on the box by the side of the prisoner was to send a bullet into the coach.

A yell of pain followed, and two shots came back from within, but without damage, though the prisoner called out:

"Say, pards, you'll kill me."

Another shot from the driver into the coach brought forth:

"Hold on, for we coves!"

"Hand out your weapons one by one."

A revolver was thrust from a window.

Instantly the driver severed the bonds on one hand of the prisoner and said, hoarsely:

"Take that weapon!"

The man obeyed, unsuspecting the cunning of the mad driver.

As his hand was reached down a shot came from within, and it shattered it, while with a yell of triumph his head was thrust out of the coach and a hand with a revolver.

A shot, and the man fell across the window, the weapon dropping from his hand.

"Do you intend to make me kill you, too?" came the stern demand of the driver to the other man.

"No, I surrenders!"

"Then hand out your weapons, one in each hand, and held by the barrels."

The weapons came out as directed, and were taken by the mad driver.

"There are more!"

"Only one, pard," and out came the weapon.

"Now, get out and lie flat on your face!"

The man obeyed, and, taking a rope from the box caddy, Silk-Ribbon Sam sprang down and quickly bound the prisoner.

Then he went to the one he had hurled from the box and found that he had a broken shoulder.

He raised him in his arms as though he was a child and placed him in the coach, disarming him of his belt of weapons, which he seemed in no humor to use.

The dead body of the man he had shot from the box was also put in the coach, the prisoner followed, and was securely bound there, and then the driver

unhitched his four leaders, dragged the dead animals out of the way, made two of the others wheelers, and, getting upon his box, drove on as quietly as though nothing had occurred.

"You are a remarkable man, indeed, and if you are mad there is method in your madness," said Ned Marsden, lost in admiration of the man who had so cleverly taken his coach against such odds as he had had to contend with.

The mad driver made no reply, but drove on in silence, managing his two new wheelers, which, unused to the pole, were fretting and plunging, with the skill of a master of the reins as he was.

As they reached the valley the driver drew rein, and, turning to his prisoner on the box with him, said as though continuing the conversation:

"And you are a brave man, and I will now dress the wound your friend gave you, for here is a stream of water."

CHAPTER XII.

AT DANGER STATION.

The stage horn blew just as merrily as the coach approached Danger Station as though within it there were not two dead forms, a man with a broken shoulder and two prisoners.

The mad driver drew up at the station, tossed the reins on the backs of his horses, and springing down to the ground said, quietly:

"Mr. Sawyer, that man on the box went through as a passenger with me, you remember, but a soldier, under orders from General Miles, arrested him and sent him back to-day as a prisoner.

"The men inside proved to be his friends and attempted his rescue, so that accounts for what you will find in the coach in the way of dead and disabled— Oh! Surgeon Powell, here is a letter for you from the soldier I met on Red Top, and he told me to deliver the prisoner to you also."

And Silk-Ribbon Sam turned to Surgeon Powell, who just then came out of the cabin, having arrived at Danger Station but a few moments before.

As the mad driver was to go no further, that being the end of his line, he turned the coach over to the driver who was to take it on and walked off toward his cabin.

Nick Sawyer was amazed.

There were two dead men in the coach, one with

a broken shoulder, a prisoner, and on the box another bound man, one of whose hands was bound up from a wound received.

The face of the mad driver had been badly scratched from his fall in the bushes, and there was blood on his shoulder from the scalp wound on his head.

"Pard Doctor, there has been the devil to pay on this run," said Nick Sawyer.

"Yes, and Driver Sam's report was too modest to learn much about it," replied Powell, who had just finished reading the letter Sam had given him from Buffalo Bill.

"This man will doubtless let us know all about it, while I dress his wound.

"I am glad I happened to ride up here to-day," continued Surgeon Powell, as he stepped toward the prisoner, Marsden.

"There's no reason why I shouldn't tell.

"The soldier who arrested me took me for a member of the Red-men's band and sent me back to you. These men thought I was being imposed on, I suppose, and attempted my rescue, with the result you see, and the moral is to let that mad driver alone," and Ned Marsden spoke in a reckless sort of way, hiding the pain from his wound as best he could.

"I recognize you, sir, as the bogus courier who gave us a call at the fort, as this letter says you are; but I suppose it is to be proven whether you are a Red Rider or not.

"Let me look to your wound, please."

The driver dressed it like one who knew what he was about, but, of course, had no surgical instruments.

"I only hope I will not lose my hand," and by degrees the prisoner told all that had happened, while Surgeon Powell dressed the wound, remarking:

"The bullet, fortunately for you, passed between the first and second bones, making an ugly wound, but not a serious one.

"Now to yonder poor fellow who seems to be suffering," and he pointed to the man with the broken shoulder.

This was soon set, and the stage, which had been detained by Nick Sawyer, went on to the settlement with the two wounded men and the prisoner, Surgeon Powell returning with it to look after the sufferers.

The two dead men were buried at Danger Station,

and Silk-Ribbon Sam walked up to the graves and looked on with the coldest manner possible, and in perfect silence.

CHAPTER XIII.

Meanwhile Buffalo Bill in the wilderness was carefully studying his map and several other papers he had secured from Ned Marsden, the outlaw he had captured.

These showed that Ned Marsden was indeed a prisoner of the band of Red-men or Red Riders, as the outlaws were variously called.

They also showed that a notorious outlaw, known as Red Robin, was the head of the band.

Buffalo Bill then studied carefully the map he had secured.

The retreat of the Red Riders was in the recesses of the mountains known as the Wild Range.

To reach it one must have a guide, and such was the difficulty of access to it that a dozen men could have, at a number of points that could not be flanked, kept at bay several hundred.

Then, too, there was a hostile tribe of Indians whose village was in the Wild Range, though at a point distant from the rendezvous of the outlaws, and this alone would make a band of Vigilantes or company of soldiers cautious about pursuing the Red Riders into their fastnesses.

The band numbered a score of men, and they were as wild a lot as were the savages or the wolves about them.

They lived in rude cabins, spent their time in carousing, card playing and idleness, going only upon raids when they needed money.

The chief had a sentinel at an advanced post constantly on duty, and drilled the band into discipline.

Buffalo Bill knew all this, and yet he dared alone, save for his horse, to penetrate into the haunts of this band of cutthroats. Early the next morning he set out, and late that evening his knowledge of the country showed him that he was in the land of Red Robin, the outlaw chief.

The track was plain here, from the nature of the ground, and he pressed on rapidly, not caring to spare his horse then, and wishing him to appear as though hard-ridden.

He was also anxious to reach the den of the Red-men before nightfall.

Further and further into the Wild Range he went, and still following the trail he had so persistently pursued.

He could well understand why the Red-men had selected a spot so well calculated to hide in against pursuit and for defense.

It was near sunset when he suddenly rode upon a picket, and a rifle bullet whizzed by his ears the instant he had seen the man.

Quickly Buffalo Bill threw his hands above his head and cried out:

"Hold, pard, I'm no foe!"

"Yer comes in ther wrong colors ter be a friend o' this outfit."

Such was the reply of the man who had fired at Buffalo Bill as he approached the retreat of the Red-men.

The scout had felt that the man had shot at him, and missed, so he had held his hands above his head and stated that he was no foe.

"I am in the army uniform, yes; but I escaped from the fort to save my life, and came to join the Red-men."

"Ah! who is yer?"

"I'm Sergeant Dave Dawson, of the cavalry, or rather was before I deserted."

"I has seen notices stuck up thet yer hed shot a comrade and then desarted, and was ter be shot; but you had made yer escape?"

"Yes, I did."

"I seen a notice stuck up at ther Cross Trails."

"Yer name is Dave Dawson?"

"Yes."

"That's ther name was posted; but who sent yer here?"

"No one, only the troopers were after me, and I hid in the mountains until I could come here."

"Who did yer come here ter see?"

"The Red Riders."

"To jine 'em?"

"Yes."

The man stood on the other side of a bowlder, his head and shoulders only showing.

On the top of the bowlder lay his rifle, cocked and pointed toward Buffalo Bill, who sat upon his horse some twenty feet away.

"You is a bad man, from what yer says o' yerself, for yer shooted a pard, desarted, and when captered has made yer escape ter keep from being shot. Now

we is honest men and don't encourage no wickedness," said the sentinel, with an attempt at wit.

"So I have heard; but I thought you'd like to have one black sheep in the fold."

"Waal, as to that, this hain't no sheepfold, but ruther a wolf-hut; but, howsomever, as yer has come here, I has ter take yer in to ther chief."

"But how on 'arth did yer find us?"

"I had heard that the Red Riders had their retreat in the Wild Range, and I came on here until I struck the trail of a horse and followed it."

"I see; but you is sart'in yer is alone?"

"Oh, yes; who could be with me?"

"Waal, I has ter be on ther safe side, so I'll jist call fer help, and not leave my post o' duty."

As he spoke he fired his revolver in the air three times, slowly, evidently a signal.

In five minutes there was heard the clatter of hoofs, and two horsemen appeared in sight.

Like the sentinel, they were dressed in red, and their faces were painted the same hue.

They rode blood-red bay horses, and were thoroughly armed.

As they came up they drew rein, surveying the supposed deserter closely.

"Pards, this gent are a deserter from ther fort."

"Yer remembers we seen a notice stuck up at ther Cross Trails offering a reward for an escaped sergeant, Dave Dawson?"

"Yes; and is you ther man?" asked one.

"Yes."

"How did yer git here?"

"I explained to your companion, and if you will take me before your chief, I will convince him that I am all right."

"We'll do it, and not take yer blindfolded, nuther, for if you don't pan out squar', ye'll never git back."

With this uncomfortable assurance the two men rode up to the pretended deserter and disarmed him.

Then, with one in the rear and the other leading the way, they rode on toward the retreat.

A prettier spot could not have been well selected, for the camp was in a small glen, with mountains towering above, a fall dashing down over a lofty cliff, and the clearest of crystal streams running down the valley.

There were meadowlands near, covered with a drove of horses, and the cabins scattered about had

near them fenced-in patches, where the outlaws had their gardens full of vegetables.

There were but two passes down into or from the valley or glen, and the outlaws could never be caught napping, for a sentinel was at either one, and if forced to retreat they could readily escape one way or the other and by a trail that defied pursuit.

The cabin of the chief was really a comfortable structure, built like the old-time Southern cabin, two rooms on either side, with an open space between, and surrounded by a shed which was by courtesy called the piazza.

Several hammocks were swung under this shed, saddles, bridles and weapons hung on the wall, and two large dogs lay out in front of the cabin, giving it a homelike appearance that seemed strange for that wild land.

There was an appearance about the little settlement of comfort, and also of discipline, and one dropping in upon the picturesque scene would never have suspected that he was in the camp of outlaws, the cruel and desperate Red Riders of the Rocky Mountains.

At a table sat a man, the chief.

The table was littered with gold, and the chief was dividing it into separate parts, all equal save two.

One of these two was for the common treasury of the band, the other the chief's share, and the score or more smaller piles were for the men.

The man was the one who had become chief of the Red Riders through his bold determination to win that position.

It was Red Robin, and he had become the idol of his men.

He was dressed in a suit of red velvet, a broad-brimmed sombrero of the same hue hung on the back of his chair, and a crimson, close-fitting mask was upon the table by his side.

His hair was long, waving, falling upon his shoulders, and his handsome face was beardless, giving him a very youthful appearance.

Stylish boots came up above his knees, and were armed with gold spurs, a sash of gold thread woven by some fair hand encircled his waist, half-concealing the belt that held his arms.

He wore a loose-fitting silk shirt, snow-white, and the collar was encircled by a scarf of red silk, in which was a pin representing a hand of coral holding four aces.

Around his hat was a chain of five-dollar gold pieces, and altogether Red Robin, chief of the Red Riders, was a very striking and remarkable-looking personage.

He glanced up as he beheld the two men of his band approaching with a prisoner, and as they halted before his cabin, he arose and advanced to meet them, his jingling spurs and coins making pleasing music with every step.

"Well, men, who have you there?" he said, in a rich, decided voice.

"We'll let him do his own talkin', cap'n, for Sloan give him to us ter fetch ter you," said one of the men.

"Well, sir, how is it a man in your uniform find himself in the camp of the Red Riders?" sternly asked Red Robin, gazing with admiration upon the superb form and handsome face of the pretended deserter.

Like Centaur did Buffalo Bill sit his horse, and he certainly presented a fine appearance, in spite of his travel-stained uniform.

"I was so unfortunate, sir, as to shoot a comrade over a game of cards, and, believing I had killed him I deserted, was captured and sentenced to death."

"I made my escape, and, after hiding in the mountains for some days, sought your camp, to see if might cast my lot with yours."

The words were spoken sadly, but with seeming frankness, and Red Robin said:

"What is your name, sir?"

"Dave Dawson, late sergeant of the Third Cavalry."

"Ah, yes; I saw the name posted on the Overland Trail, with an offer of a thousand dollars reward for your body, dead or alive, from the commandant of the fort."

"Yes, sir, Captain Carrol."

"Well, I see how a thousand dollars can be made but we are not so badly off for money, business being good with us just now, so I will not deliver you up."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now tell me how you found your way here?"

"I had heard the Red Riders had a retreat in the Wild Range, so made my way here, struck a fresh trail yesterday, and followed it until your sentinel fired on me."

"And missed you?"

"Yes, sir; by an inch."

"That man must practice more; but I am glad, for your sake, he missed you.

"Now tell me, what do you wish to do?"

"Join your band, for I am a hunted man, the shadow of death hanging upon me."

"Well, I want good men, and if you are not one, your looks belie you.

"I will tell you that to become a Red-man you have to take an oath that appalls most men, and I have never known it to be broken since I originated it, and woe be unto the man who does.

"I lost my lieutenant to-day by death, he having been thrown by his horse, and if you are the man I take you for, you can soon step into his shoes.

"Now go and take his cabin, and rig yourself out in our carmine uniform.

"Your horse is a good one, but will not do for work, as we ride only blood bays.

"To-morrow at sunrise one will come to administer the oath to you, so be prepared.

"Now tell me what news from the fort you can give me."

"None, sir; for you know I was in the guardhouse, and, since my escape, was hiding in the woods."

"Ah, yes; now go to your quarters with these men, who will look after your comfort."

The pretended deserter rode away with his two guards for the small cabin.

As he departed Red Robin resumed the counting of his gold.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

When Buffalo Bill was taken to the cabin he congratulated himself upon his success.

He felt sure that not a suspicion had entered the mind of the chief of the Red Riders that all was not right, and he was sure that he could do much while in the camp of the outlaws to bring them to justice.

He had trailed the chief to his lair, and he had caught him counting his stolen gold.

He had found the outlaws' retreat was not impregnable, and he guessed at their number.

He had no intention of taking the oath. It was his plan to escape, if possible.

He had no idea of waiting in the cabin until sunrise the next morning. He knew that the door was watched, but he knew that the darkness of night

would help him, and, besides, he knew the trail well that led to the home of the Red Riders.

That night he had made an opening in the ceiling of his cabin, and was soon on the roof.

Without a sound he slipped to the ground at the rear, dropped on his hands and knees, and disappeared into the bushes.

He did not dare to look for his horse, for fear of arousing the attention of some outlaws, and so he had a long journey to make on foot.

He had no food with him, but he was a man of iron, and did not fear the ordeal that was before him.

At length he had crawled out of range of the sentinels of the Red Riders, and two days later was back at the frontier settlement, where he had left Surgeon Powell, Captain Carrol and his troopers and Silk-Ribbon Sam.

To his joy he learned that the mad driver had recovered his reason, thanks to the care of Surgeon Powell.

He was the first to volunteer for the expedition that Buffalo Bill immediately organized to proceed against the Red Riders.

That expedition was a complete success. The Red Riders were surprised and overwhelmed.

Red Robin, their leader, was killed in the fight between the outlaws on one side, and the scouts and soldiers, led by Buffalo Bill, on the other.

Twenty of the robbers were captured and hung, together with Ned Marsden, the outlaw whom Buffalo Bill had captured from the stagecoach.

"Thank God!" said Buffalo Bill, shaking hands with Silk-Ribbon Sam. "Thank God that it is all over, for I am tired out with the scouting and trailing I have done recently. I need a few days' rest."

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 64) will contain "Buffalo Bill's Dead-Shot Pard; or, The Will-o'-the-Wisp of the Trails."

You are already acquainted with the Will-o'-the-Wisp of the Trails, boys, but you know him by another name. The desperate tussle that he gave Buffalo Bill this time ended in his death.



THRILLING ADVENTURE



Spinning along at a swift pace. That's what this contest is doing. It's getting up speed every minute, and it's going to be a hot finish, and no mistake, at the post.
Look on page 31 for full particulars.

In a Burning House.

(By A. Bennett, Virginia.)

It was in the month of January, on Wednesday. I was asleep in my room upstairs when I was awakened by something I don't know what, but I wanted some water. I could not get my breath; it looked like something was strangling me to death. I rushed out of my bed and as I did so I saw a blue blaze flash up through a crack in the top step of the stairs.

I jumped, and I went clear down the steps and struck my head against something and it knocked me senseless.

I did not know anything until some one caught hold of me.

The house had caught fire in the closet under the steps and as they pulled me up, the steps fell in and the fire came all over the house.

They took me out, and as we got to the door my grandfather pushed the window sash out upstairs, and it fell, and a piece of the glass hit me on the head and cut me. They said they gave me up as dead for three days. The scar is on my head now. If that was not a narrow escape I would not like to have one.

Shipwrecked.

(By W. Hearthway, Md.)

One morning my pard and I went out rowing very early and were enjoying ourselves very much, when on a sudden we heard a noise, and looking around we saw two tramps giving chase to us. We waited for them to come close, suspecting no danger.

They were drunk and demanded us to give up our boat. We started to driving our boat faster and faster until we got nearly out of sight of them, when of a sudden we ran into a blown-down tree and were capsized, but managed to reach the shore in some fashion.

We roamed about in the woods, following the river back for some hours, and then we became hungry.

We had one hook from out of my pocket. We did not

have my line or rod, so we concluded to tear up one of our handkerchiefs and make a line.

We cut a rod; then we had nothing to sink it with, so we had to get a shell and tie it on to it and soon had some roasted fish.

After we ate them we started again.

At last we came up to a carriage and were carried home.

On a Fishing Trip.

(By George Duren, Ga.)

Not long ago my chum and I went fishing and it started to rain. We were walking along the river bank when I saw a log, and I said:

"Joe, let's go across."

"All right; but you better look out. You will fall in, this is mighty slippery."

Then I heard him halloa, and I looked up. He had fallen in the river.

I laughed at him and when he got out he said:

"Look there at that snake."

It made me jump, and I fell into the river.

I got out and we made a fire, but I didn't laugh at him any more.

Why I Learned to Swim.

(By Walter Davis, Iowa.)

I thought I would write up another anecdote.

This is the experience I recently passed through:

I was going down the street when I met my chum and he said:

"Let's go fishing."

I said: "All right; wait here until I go and get my fishing tackle."

When I got back we started for the creek, found a good fishing hole and commenced to fish. I was sitting on a high bank when the dirt slipped from under me and down I went into the water. I went over my head. I

couldn't swim, so I thought the time had come for me to pass in my chips. I was just going down the last time when some one grabbed me and I didn't know any more. When I came to, the doctor was bending over me. The first words I said were: "Where am I at?"

They told me that my chum had yelled for help, and a man had come and got me out. You bet I didn't go back there until I learned how to swim.

What Happened in a Tornado.

(By Archie Berry, Ill.)

The incident I am about to relate happened when I was about five years old, and it is one which I will remember to the end of my life.

It was in a little Pennsylvania town where it happened. It was at the time the oil boom was on in that State. There was an oil derrick erected about ten feet the other side of the house in which we lived.

There had been a few small wind storms for a few days preceding this memorable day in my life, and the stream in back of our house had become a raging torrent. Many of the people had fled to the hills, fearing a flood.

Only my mother and I were at home, when she happened to look out the window toward the oil derrick, and she saw something which almost made her faint.

It was a funnel-shaped cloud and the house was right in its path.

Remembering that the lights on the top floor were lit she knew that the house would get on fire when the derrick or part of another house struck it. She picked me up and losing not a minute, she ran upstairs and turned the gas off just as the derrick crushed the front of the house and tore its way through to the basement. We were not hurt in the least, and only suffered from the excitement and a severe drenching from the storm.

Saved By Presence of Mind.

(By James Walter Lanford, S. C.)

One evening, just after dinner, Henry Flidner and I decided we would take a little spin on our bicycles to Paris Mountain, which is about eight miles from where we live.

So about three o'clock we set off.

After about an hour of hard riding we arrived at our destination, without having met with any adventure of moment.

We spent some time on the mountain and then started for home.

About one mile from the mountain we were riding down a hill, and going at a great rate of speed. Just in front of us the road abruptly turned to the right. We could not see beyond the curve, and of course could not see a buggy containing some ladies advancing along the road.

Just as we reached this turn in the road we met them. The road was very narrow just there. Henry, who was about twenty yards in front of me, being more expert with a wheel than I, jumped off his wheel and dragged it into the ditch at the side of the road. As we were

going down hill this was very dangerous, at the rate of speed we were riding, and only his presence of mind saved him from being hurt very badly.

The ladies drove the buggy to one side of the road, and just as Henry dragged his wheel out of the way I whizzed past him.

If he had been a second later both of us would have been very badly hurt. In the excitement of the moment I managed to keep control over my wheel and no damage was done.

Henry said I was as pale as death. It was the closest call I ever had. We reached home without further adventure.

Adventures.

(By Harry Lindgren, Minn.)

One bright, sunny day, as we were going through the woods we heard a curious cry. It was a terrible, huge, black, grizzly bear's cry. As we came nearer the cry grew stronger. I never saw such a large bear. It looked as though it was ready to eat us up. My father shot at him and struck him right in the head. He fell down and lay as though he was dead when we came up to him. Three others came upon us like lions; but father had two other men with him, so they shot at them. They all died at once. Then we all walked up the mountain; then we came to a very slippery place, and a bush in the center. As we caught hold of it, it broke, but of course we had ropes tied to us. We all slipped about forty feet down the next time.

We got up, but as we came nearer the top the air grew thinner and we began to feel sick; then we began to spit blood. Then we thought it would be better to go down.

But going down was worse than going up. When we were going down we slipped again and went down more than sixty feet.

In this fall I was bruised, and in a while was well, but after that I have had a trade mark.

The Boy Who Couldn't Swim.

(By Ernest Goodwin, N. Y.)

One fine afternoon my brother, four other boys and myself decided to go in swimming, so off we went.

The other boys could swim, but I couldn't, so I stayed in water about a foot deep and watched the other boys swim.

I thought I would try, and the other boys started to go out and dress and I was on the opposite side, so in I went over my head, and I started to yell, "H-h-h-help," and I went down once, and when I came up one of the boys jumped in and grabbed me, and I never went in the water again until I could swim.

Turning Turtle.

(By John Drake, R. I.)

One summer I made a canoe. It was eight feet nine inches long and two feet wide. It took two to carry it, and I and another fellow went sailing every Saturday. I

had a friend that went up in the country, and he came back and wanted to go sailing in my canoe.

He said Maspog was a good place, so we took the canoe and started. The pond was a big one, and it was rough when the wind blew, and many boys had been drowned in it, so my friend was afraid to go across.

I said that if he didn't go across I wouldn't go at all, so he said he wouldn't be afraid, so we put the canoe in the water and started off, and a lot of men said we would be lucky if we got very far.

We went across and sailed toward the ice-house, and it was very rough.

We got near the ice-house and we were rocking, and my friend got afraid.

Suddenly we tipped over.

We could swim a little, and we swam to the ice-house. The canoe didn't sink. We went and got a boat, but my friend wouldn't help me row to my canoe because he was so scared.

A Fight With An Alligator.

(By E. A. Richards, Fla.)

About twenty years ago I was returning from a camp hunt on the sand hills in Orange County. We hunted three days, killed seven large deer. My companion drove the ox cart carrying the game and camping out, while I followed a deer trail that led down along by a small creek. In the course of a mile, I came to an almost impenetrable line of bamboo briar vines, which I could only penetrate by crawling on my hands and knees. When I emerged it was in a small, grassy glade about fifty feet across in either direction. On one side was the creek, while I was almost entirely surrounded by the thicket of bamboo briar vines. As I rose to my feet I saw a large alligator slide into a hole full of water about six feet wide, and two feet deep. At that time his hide was worth one dollar, so I decided to capture him. I took a small pole which I cut and prodded him in the head. When he threw his head out of the water and snapped his jaws at the pole. I took a quick sight and fired, but the ball from my old-fashioned muzzle-loader only grazed the right side of his head, putting out his right eye.

The next moment he rushed out of the water and charged roughly at me, his sound eye fairly glittering with rage. He made several rushes, which I only avoided by jumping away on the blind side of him. In the meantime I was trying to reload. I had succeeded in pouring in the powder, and had the rifle between my knees in the act of driving home the ball when the alligator turned around so as to catch sight of me. This time he was only about fifteen feet away, but his rush was so quick that I had to drop my rifle to save my legs. Until then I had not thought of my heavy bowie-knife which I always carried in my belt while hunting, and drawing it from its sheath I sprang off on his blind side at his next rush, and quickly turning around I jumped with my right foot on the alligator's nose, and with my left hand resting on his ugly, scaly back to steady myself. I drove the point of my bowie at his eye, and by great good luck the knife blade slid to the brain.

How it happened I can hardly explain, but the next moment I turned a somersault about eight feet in the air

and landed with a thump on the ground alongside of Mr. 'Gater. The next instant I was up and running, as I had lost hold of my knife. My heart was apparently in my throat with fright, and as I glanced over my shoulder, I saw the 'gater lying very still. I approached him cautiously, and after finding him to be past fighting I commenced to hunt for my knife, and after a fifteen minutes' search I found it standing on its point in a bunch of broom hedge grass twelve feet away from the alligator. His hide when taken off measured ten feet three inches long. I have killed hundreds of them for their hides, but that was the worst fight I ever had with one of them.

The Masked Man of the Night—A Thrilling Episode.

(By George G. Golden, N. Y.)

A passenger train was whirling around a lofty point in the Rocky Mountains.

It was night, and dark. To the passengers it was naught but blank space.

On one side of the train towered a great wall of a mountain perpendicular and hundreds of feet high. The other side looked over a precipice into a deep, yawning canyon.

Beautiful scenery can be observed in the daytime in these highlands, among which, a train of cars seem but a toy. Of a sudden the train gave a backward lurch, throwing the dumfounded passengers forward in their seats, and began to slow up.

In the engine cab, the engineer and fireman were being held up by one masked man!

"Stop!" he commanded, sternly. "Go no further if you value your lives! I am the 'Masked Man of the Night.'"

That name had made many a man tremble through all the great Rockies, and it did these two, who had nothing to do but to obey.

Giving them a warning not to try any tricks while he was gone, the Masked Man climbed over the tender into the baggage-car where he collected a few light valuables and passed on into the first passenger coach.

Standing in the exit he leveled his revolver at the scared men and frightened women who were trying to hide themselves and their valuables.

"Hands up, all!" said he. "The 'Masked Man of the Night' commands you!"

The frightened passengers' hands flew up before the menace of that pistol and that dreaded name. But one of those hands was steady and held a pistol, backed by a well-dressed, cool and determined young man.

"Hands up yourself, Jack James!" was the response.

Staggered for a moment, the masked man exclaimed, hoarsely:

"Sam Starr, detective!"

"Yes," coolly, "I knew you in spite of your mask. I have tracked you from New York City for a diamond robbery committed years ago."

"It's life or death between us," hissed Jack James.

Crack!

Crack!

A fusillade began, and the passengers hid themselves under the seats.

Sam Starr advanced and Jack James retreated. The

esperado was now on the lookout for a good chance to escape.

Crack!

Crack!

Two more shots pealed out.

Suddenly the desperado drew himself upon the car roof with the agility of a cat.

The young detective followed with no less quickness. Then the demoralized passengers heard a terrific scuffling overhead, mingled with the crashing and jingling of glass upon their heads and in the aisle. All this time the two men in the engine cab dared nothing for fear of a bullet from somewhere in the darkness.

The people in the other parts of the train were paralyzed with the thought of a robber being aboard, and consequently remained inactive. As for the train hands, they were also cowed and left the job to our hero.

Suddenly a wild yell rent the night air without, and then all was still.

Presently Sam Starr appeared and was met by the conductor, who asked, breathlessly:

"Where is he?"

"Dead!" was the cool answer.

"But—"

"Down below."

That was enough. The conductor was profuse in shelling out his thanks, and gratified that no other damage was done than the loss of a thousand dollars, the smashing of skylights and an oil lamp.

Sam Starr was duly rewarded by both the passengers and the railroad company.

In a little while the train was again speeding peacefully through the highlands, and our young detective kept with it until it reached San Francisco, from whence he returned to New York. He heard nothing more of Jack James, "The Masked Man of the Night."

Fun With a Striped Bass.

(By Chas. Brownell, New York.)

If the readers of this story have had any experience in salt-water fishing they will probably know that a striped bass, if any size, gives a terrible fight, and it was only last summer that I had my first experience with one. I was stopping at Glen Cove, a small village on Long Island near the Sound, and was there about a week when I was invited to go fishing with an old friend.

We had hardly put our lines out when I had a terrible strike which nearly pulled me overboard.

Then the fun began, under the boat and away the line fairly flew, cutting my hands until they nearly bled.

At last I landed him. When he first came out of the water he looked like a shining mass of gold and silver, and weighed seven and one-half pounds.

I carried him home on a string so that everybody could see him, and I believe I was the proudest, happiest boy in all America.



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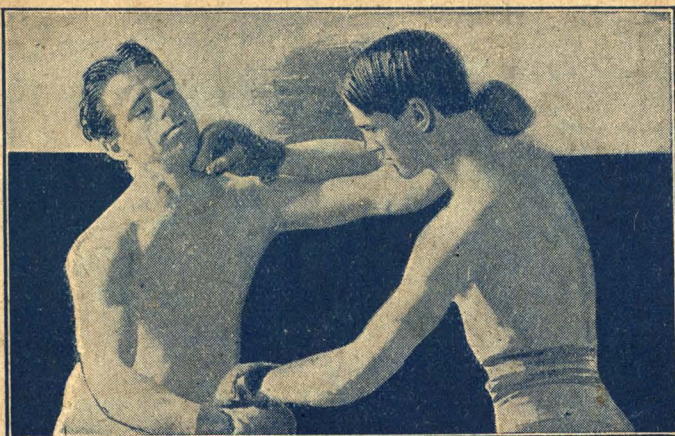
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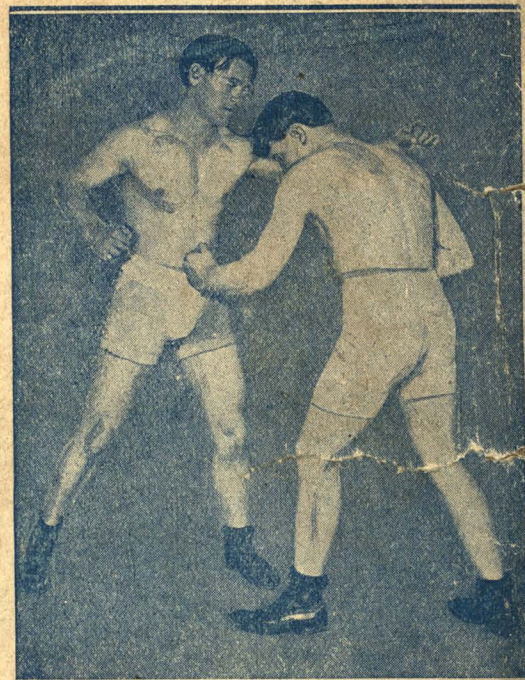
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